

## COUNCIL POLICY

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SUBJECT: SCHOOL PEDESTRIAN SAFETY POLICY

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### **PURPOSE:**

The purpose of this policy is to provide comprehensive guidelines for maintaining and improving school pedestrian safety and improved vehicular access and mobility around school.

### **BACKGROUND:**

The Police Department and the Transportation Department have the responsibility of coordinating traffic safety with all the school districts that serve the City of San Diego area.

On September 26, 2001, the Public Safety and Neighborhood Services Committee (PS&NS) directed the City Manager to update the SCHOOL PEDESTRIAN SAFETY POLICIES AND WARRANTS (herein renamed as SCHOOL SAFETY GUIDELINES). The *School Safety Guidelines* will serve as a companion guide and a reference to this Council Policy and will be updated concurrent with this policy. The *School Safety Guidelines* are a technical document based on federal and state guidelines and legislation which may change from year to year. For that reason, the *School Safety Guidelines* will be reviewed and updated by the City Manager as needed

PS&NS recommended that the Police Department and the Transportation Department, in coordination with the Planning Department develop a comprehensive policy for traffic safety in school areas. PS&NS recommended that the process to develop such policies should include the Safe Routes Coalition, Parent Teacher Association groups (PTA), and the local school districts. Furthermore, PS&NS recommended that key issues such as changes to the vehicle code, considerations for building new schools and that traffic calming applications be considered as part of the new strategies for traffic safety improvements.

The *School Safety Guidelines* contain proven methods and recommendations for traffic safety improvements through a combination of education, enforcement, engineering and community planning. Education techniques include "defensive walking" instructions to school children and parents. Enforcement techniques are effective in reaching chronic traffic violators among motorists and pedestrians. Aggressive prosecution of violators helps to reinforce the respect for the rights and responsibilities of motorists and pedestrians alike. Engineering techniques provide a number of strategies and countermeasures to improve pedestrian and motorist safety and mobility.

Good community planning techniques help provide a safe and pleasant walking environment, and minimize conflicts between pedestrians and motorists. Close coordination between school districts, community groups, public health advocates and transit providers will ensure that proposed locations for new school sites will take into account the concerns from the residents in the area, and will be adequately coordinated with City departments and agencies. Further,

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benefits of enhanced pedestrian safety include public health and mobility benefits by allowing more children to walk to school. Schools can also be centers of a community that provide joint use recreational facilities and community gathering spaces.

### **Responsibilities: City of San Diego**

The California Department of Transportation Traffic Manual ("Traffic Manual") delegates school traffic safety and control to local agencies (City Transportation and Police departments) in close coordination with school authorities. The California Vehicle Code (CVC) authorizes cities to enact and enforce rules and regulations to manage traffic along public streets.

CVC section 21372 states, "The Department of Transportation and local authorities shall, with respect to highways under their respective jurisdictions, establish and promulgate warrants to be used as guidelines for the placement of traffic control devices near schools for the purpose of protecting students going to and from school. Such devices may include flashing signals. Such warrants shall be based upon, but need not be limited to, the following items: pedestrian volumes, vehicle volumes, width of the roadway, physical terrain, speed of vehicle traffic, horizontal and vertical alignment of the roadway, the distance to existing traffic control devices, proximity to the school, and the degree of urban or rural environment of the area."

CVC Section 21373 states, "The governing board of any school district may request the appropriate city, county, city and county or state agency to install traffic control devices in accordance with the warrants established pursuant to Section 21372. Within 90 days thereafter, the city, county, city and county or state agency involved shall undertake an engineering and traffic survey to determine whether the requested crossing protection meets the warrants established pursuant to Section 21372. The city, county, city and county, or state agency involved may require the requesting school district to pay an amount not to exceed 50 percent of the cost of the survey. If it is determined that such requested protection is warranted, it shall be installed by the city, county, city and county or state agency involved."

### **Responsibilities: School District**

The relationship between a school district and a local agency in the planning and design of new school sites is governed by the California Government Code. California Government Code Section 53094 states, "(a) Notwithstanding any other provision of this article, this article does not require a school district to comply with the zoning ordinances of a county or city unless the zoning ordinance makes provision for the location of public schools and unless the City or county has adopted a general plan. (b) Notwithstanding subdivision (a), the governing board of a school district, that has complied with the requirements of Section 65352.2 of this code and Section 21151.2 of the Public Resources Code, by a vote of two-thirds of its members, may render a city or county zoning ordinance inapplicable to a proposed use of property by the school district. The governing board of the school district may not take this action when the proposed

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use of the property by the school district is for non-classroom facilities, including, but not limited to, warehouses, administrative buildings, and automotive storage and repair buildings.”

It is essential for the City to develop a close working relationship with all school districts serving our community in order to insure that all new school sites are designed and constructed taking into account safety for children and adequate access for vehicles. This Policy establishes formal channels of communication with the school districts.

It is important that new development and construction which impacts school safety be closely monitored and adjusted to provide continuous safe access to schools. Proper planning, design, layout, orientation and implementation of projects can help provide a safe and desirable school pedestrian and vehicular environment for both short-term and long-term needs.

The following countermeasures are examined in detail in the *School Safety Guidelines* document. Any of these measures can be used in order to resolve conflicts between pedestrians and motorists in the vicinity of school sites:

1. Parking management ("no parking" and loading zones)
2. School safety patrol program
3. School signs and markings
4. Marked crosswalks
5. Flashing beacons
6. Stop signs
7. Traffic signals
8. Separation structures

### **Disability Concerns:**

Since 1975, the City has maintained a disabled citizens advisory committee, known as Committee for the Removal of Architectural Barriers (“SCRAB”). This committee advises the City concerning the safety and mobility needs of the disabled community on the public right-of-way and in City-owned buildings, parks, and beaches. It also helps identify and prioritize accessibility projects using Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds. Over the years it has been responsible for the implementation and extension of a number of safety and mobility improvement programs including:

Pedestrian ramps  
Braille and tactile plaques and devices  
Audible traffic signals  
Building ramps and lifts  
Accessible restrooms and drinking fountains  
Obstacle avoidance devices (guy wires, news racks, telephones)

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Tactile guide strips and warning devices at crosswalks.

The School Safety Advisory Committee should have a permanent representative from SCRAB in order to insure that accessibility issues are adequately addressed.

### **TRAFFIC OPERATIONS: POLICE DEPARTMENT AND TRANSPORTATION DEPARTMENT**

It shall be the City's Policy that the Transportation Department and the Police Department jointly coordinate the installation of traffic control devices for all school sites. All traffic safety issues shall be first evaluated based on the *School Safety Guidelines* by the Transportation Department. The Transportation Department will review the results of these evaluations with the Police Department and the appropriate school district. This process will insure that comments from school officials and law enforcement are taken into consideration. If there is no agreement among the above entities, then the concerns shall be forwarded to the *School Safety Advisory Committee* (discussed in detail in the Advocacy section of this Policy) for further consideration. The Transportation Department should consider all suggestions from this committee prior to making a final determination.

### **PLANNING**

Good planning can provide for optimum pedestrian safety. It is important that the design and layout of neighborhoods take into account the separation of pedestrians from high-speed, high-volume through-traffic without adversely affecting accessibility and mobility of either the pedestrian or motorist. If possible, neighborhoods should be designed such that schools, recreation centers, libraries, shopping facilities and other pedestrian-oriented amenities do not expose pedestrians unnecessarily to traffic, nor require pedestrians, especially children or senior citizens, to have to cross high-volume, high speed streets. Rather, schools should be considered a community's focal point with good access to transit and other community amenities. Special attention should be directed to not locate new school facilities at multi-lane, wide and high-volume streets. Such facilities should be designed to provide students safe access without having to cross in traffic on busy streets. Traffic signals, pedestrian separated structures, and other infrastructure should be considered in these cases. The school districts should consider the impact of school boundaries to the safe route to school.

During the process of a community plan or general plan update, the Planning Department shall work with the appropriate school district to identify any new potential school sites. This siting should consider the future traffic and access conditions. The primary goal in selecting potential sites should be the safety of children. Sites adjacent to streets with 4 or more lanes of traffic should be avoided. An effort should be made to identify pedestrian infrastructure needs such as traffic signals, sidewalks, separation structures or pedestrian bridges. As much as possible, comments for new school projects should be requested from the Transportation and the Police

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Department, as they are responsible for the management of traffic safety after the sites are constructed.

When a school district begins planning a new school site, it should contact the Development Services Department and coordinate planning for school pedestrian safety with the City. An initial meeting between school district representatives and City staff from the Development Services, Transportation and Planning departments should be held to facilitate this coordination. If the new school is to be located in an already existing neighborhood, the community planning group may also be represented at this initial meeting.

### **NEW SCHOOL SITE CONSTRUCTION**

Development plans which may impact school safety should be evaluated for the various pedestrian/vehicular needs. Conflict points should be identified and resolved.

Continuity of pedestrian traffic flow should be given special attention as well as accessibility for disabled persons in terms of elimination of steps, excessive grades, circuitous travel or other obstacles to safe travel. In the event a new school site is proposed, primary consideration should be given to linkages between schools, the neighborhood and its facilities and activity centers. Further, an evaluation should be conducted to determine potential pedestrian and bicycle routes that would be utilized by children to and from school. An analysis based on these routes should be used to determine the location of the school entrance as well as the location of on-site bus drop-off areas and on-site automobile parking facilities in order to reduce pedestrian/vehicular impact. Further, infrastructure, such as sidewalks, curb and gutter, pedestrian ramps as well as bicycle lanes and striping should be analyzed to determine if improvements would be necessary to improve the safety of school children, bicyclists and other pedestrians. The development of a "safe route to school" map as well as the delineation of the school area boundaries should be completed during the design stages of development. This will ensure that consideration is given to pedestrian and bicycle routes for children attending the proposed school.

According to the Progress Guide and General Plan, when siting new schools, facilities should meet the following standards:

**Elementary Schools** should accommodate a maximum of 100 students per acre, or the design capacity of permanent structures on existing school sites. A total of 500 students per school is preferred. Generally, elementary schools should serve a neighborhood or a small group of neighborhoods where students have a short distance to walk. Land uses should be predominately residential with housing types and densities to meet the school's enrollment capacity. Playgrounds should be collocated with elementary schools. In higher density areas, neighborhood parks with elderly facilities, neighborhood recreation centers and library branches could be located adjacent to the proposed site.

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**Middle Schools** should accommodate a maximum of 70 students per acre, or the design capacity of permanent structures on existing school sites. A total of 1,000 students per school is preferred. Middle schools normally have a community orientation, and a limited mixture of commercial and residential uses nearby would be acceptable in the siting of new schools. Community parks, athletic fields, community centers as well as libraries would be appropriate to collocate adjacent to new a new middle school.

**High Schools** should accommodate a maximum of 70 students per acre, or the design capacity of permanent structures on existing school sites. A total of 1,500 students per school is preferred). High schools should be buffered from residential areas. The campus should be large enough to encourage students to remain on-site and to ensure sufficient parking and traffic controls to avoid disruptive off-site parking and dangerous driving situations on neighborhood roadways. Collocated public facilities could include community centers, community or regional parks, athletic fields and libraries.

These policies should become the basis of siting new schools throughout the City's jurisdiction.

### **TRAFFIC CALMING AND NEW TECHNOLOGY**

Traffic Calming techniques can serve as an effective tool in controlling traffic and improving safety along school areas. In certain specific situations, the City Traffic Engineering Division, the Police Department, and the appropriate school district may agree that a traffic calming technique is appropriate. In such cases, the Advisory Committee may coordinate with the local community planning group and any other organizations which represent the interests of the community at large. Whenever broad consensus has been reached regarding a traffic calming approach, then the project may be included in the City's CIP program for funding and implementation.

Such traffic calming techniques shall be consistent with the City's Street Design Manual, State standards and guidelines, and any other policies and procedures from the City's Transportation Department. Red Light Photo Enforcement can improve safety at signalized intersections, and the City should give higher priority for installation of red light photo enforcement at signalized locations along school zone areas and other areas frequented by school children. The Transportation Department is encouraged to research and implement other new technologies which can improve traffic safety around schools in coordination with the Police Department and the Advisory Committee.

### **ADVOCACY**

The School Safety Advisory Committee is an advisory committee to the City of San Diego. The focus of the committee is to coordinate efforts relating to enhancing pedestrian safety near schools. The committee is comprised of representatives from city of San Diego Police

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Department, Traffic Engineering and Planning Departments, each school district within the city limits, San Diego Parochial Schools, Ninth District PTA, Children's Hospital's Safe Routes to School/Injury Free Coalition, SCRAB, and other local pedestrian safety groups. The Advisory Committee will

1. Identify and monitor child pedestrian problem spots around schools. The committee will monitor crash data, as well as serve as a central contact for emerging community concerns related to child pedestrian safety in order to identify areas with high concentration of pedestrian injuries or hazards.
2. Serve as a forum for proactively engaging transportation safety experts and planners with schools, child injury prevention specialists and the community to problem solve existing and potential child pedestrian safety issues.
3. Review and make recommendations to the City for an Annual Capital Improvement Program, track progress and report back to the City Council.
4. Identify funding sources/strategies and help coordinate efforts to obtain financial support to enhance the City's pedestrian safety improvement initiatives.
5. Promote "Walk Your Child to School Day" and encourage city leaders and employees to participate with schools throughout the city.
6. Coordinate a process to track the percentage of children who walk or bike to school as a result of "Walk Your Child to School Day".

The Committee will foster the sharing of knowledge and expertise across disciplines and with communities in order to effect proven, child pedestrian safety strategies or to develop and test innovative approaches to problems that remain unresolved.

